

# European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships: Questions and Answers

[IP/17/3585](#)

## **What is being proposed?**

The European Commission has adopted a proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships.

The Framework sets out 14 criteria to define quality and effective apprenticeships, ensuring both the development of job-related skills and the personal development of apprentices. It takes into account the diversity of vocational education and training (VET) systems across the EU and respects the Member States' competence in the area of VET.

## **What criteria are being proposed?**

The Commission proposes the following 14 criteria to define quality and effective apprenticeships, in line with national or sectoral requirements or collective agreements:

### **Criteria for learning and working conditions:**

1. **Written contract:** An apprenticeship should be based on a written contract between the employer, the apprentice and the vocational training institution.
2. **Learning outcomes:** Comprehensive learning outcomes should be defined by the employers and vocational training institutions, ensuring both job-related skills and personal development.
3. **Pedagogical support:** In-company trainers should be designated and cooperate closely with VET providers and teachers. Teachers and trainers should be supported to update their skills.
4. **Workplace component:** At least half of the apprenticeship duration should be carried out in a workplace, and there should be opportunities to undertake part of such placements abroad.
5. **Pay and/or compensation:** Apprentices should receive pay and/or compensation, taking into account cost sharing arrangements between employers, apprentices and public authorities.
6. **Social protection:** Apprentices should be entitled to social protection, including necessary insurance.
7. **Work, health and safety conditions:** The host workplace should comply with relevant rules and regulations on working conditions, in particular health and safety legislation.

### **Criteria for framework conditions:**

8. **Regulatory framework:** A clear and consistent regulatory framework should

be in place, based on partnership and a transparent dialogue among all relevant stakeholders.

9. **Involvement of social partners:** Social partners, including at sectoral level, should be involved in the design, governance and implementation of apprenticeship schemes.
10. **Support for companies:** Financial and/or non-financial support should be provided, particularly for small, medium-sized and micro-companies.
11. **Flexible pathways and mobility:** There should be flexible entry requirements, as well as opportunities for further education and training. Apprenticeships should lead to a nationally recognised qualification. Transnational mobility should be a component of apprenticeships.
12. **Career guidance and awareness raising:** Career guidance, mentoring and learner support should be provided to ensure successful outcomes and reduce drop-outs.
13. **Transparency:** The transparency of, and access to, apprenticeship offers within and between Member States should be ensured.
14. **Quality assurance and graduate tracking:** There should be quality assurance of apprenticeships and tracking of employment and career progression of apprentices.

#### **Why is it needed, and why the focus on apprenticeships?**

Apprenticeship schemes proved to be particularly effective in bringing young people from education and training into work. Evidence shows that 60-70% of apprentices move directly into a job following their apprenticeship, and in some cases this increases to 90%. Apprenticeships provide the combination of technical, transversal and soft skills that employers are looking for.

As efforts are being made to expand apprenticeship supply, it is vital to know what the criteria for success are. This is what the new Framework provides.

#### **How does this fit into the priorities of the European Commission?**

The proposal for a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships contributes to the EU's priority on jobs, growth and investment. It is part of the 2016 [New Skills Agenda for Europe](#) and its ambition to improve the quality and relevance of skills formation. The initiative also contributes to the realisation of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), which states as first principle that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning. It links to [the Education and Training 2020 strategic framework](#) and it is also a follow-up to the 2016 Communication on [Investing in Europe's Youth](#), in which the Commission announced its intention to propose a Quality Framework for Apprenticeships.

#### **What impact will it have in Member States?**

This depends on each national system. The Framework will benefit all EU Member States and in particular those with less of the quality elements in place.

A study conducted in preparation of this initiative indicates that:

- 14 countries have less than 50% of the criteria in place: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Romania.
- 6 countries have between 50% and two thirds of the criteria in place: Czech Republic, Malta, Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden.
- 8 countries have more than two thirds of the criteria in place: Austria, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovenia and the UK.

### **What are the next steps?**

The proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships has been sent to the Council to kick-start negotiations among Member States. Member States will now have to agree on the final text based on the proposal from the Commission.

### **How was the Framework developed?**

The Framework builds in particular on the tripartite [Opinion of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training \(ACVT\)](#) on “A Shared Vision for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships and Work-based Learning” from December 2016. Furthermore, it builds on the joint work of the European Social Partners on the quality and cost-effectiveness of apprenticeships, leading to a [Joint Statement by the European Social Partners](#) (BusinessEurope, CEEP, ETUC, UEAPME) in June 2016. Two hearings with European cross-industry and sectoral social partners were organised in March and June 2017. The proposal is also built on input from the European VET providers associations and stakeholders in the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. The Framework also supports the priorities of a recently launched [European Apprentices Network](#), with quality being one of its key priorities.

### **What is the state of play on the ten priority actions under the New Skills Agenda for Europe:**

#### **The Upskilling Pathways initiative**

Nearly 70 million adults in Europe struggle with reading, writing or using a computer. To help people master these basic skills, Member States in December 2016 adopted a Council Recommendation on ‘Upskilling Pathways’, based on a Commission proposal, under which they committed themselves to strengthening support for low skilled/low qualified adults. Beneficiaries will be offered: i) an individual skills assessment, to identify existing skills and upskilling needs; ii) a package of education or training designed around this assessment; and iii) opportunities to have acquired skills validated and recognised. By mid-2018, Member States will outline the measures they intend to take to implement this initiative, including which groups of low-skilled adults should be given priority.

#### **The European Qualifications Framework**

For workers and learners to move across Europe, their qualifications need to be trusted and understood. Therefore the Commission has proposed a revision

of the 'European Qualifications Framework' to make people's skills and qualifications more visible and comparable, under the form of a Council Recommendation. Member States have adopted this Recommendation in May 2017. Thanks to this framework, employers can better understand foreign qualifications and people can put their talent to use all across Europe.

### **The Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition**

Almost 40% of our labour force, or 80 million people, do not have basic digital skills, while 40% of our companies cannot find the ICT specialists they need. To close this gap, the Commission launched the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition. It brings everyone involved together – including Member States, companies, and education providers – to take action and boost digital skills. Under this umbrella, so far 17 national Digital Skills and jobs coalitions are in place and Member States are working on national digital skills strategies. 70 organisations have made pledges under the Coalition to take action to provide training and help develop digital skills.

### **The Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills**

To address skills mismatches in different sectors of the economy, the Commission launched the 'Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills'. It brings together businesses, trade unions, education and training institutions and other stakeholders to develop skills strategies which meet the needs of specific sectors to grow. More specifically, the first call to support European partnerships in six pilot sectors was launched in January 2017 (automotive, defence, maritime technology, space/geo information, textile, leather clothing and footwear, and tourism). The winning consortia have been decided and projects will start by December 2017. Six additional sectors are identified for the next Erasmus+ Call for Proposals to be published in October 2017 (construction, steel and paper, green technologies and renewable energies, additive manufacturing and maritime shipping).

### **The Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals**

Making the most of migrants' skills is a win-for-all. Therefore the Commission has launched a multilingual 'EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals' to help national authorities identify the skills of non-EU migrants, to ease their path to work or education, and ultimately their integration in society. The Tool – an enhanced CV – was launched on 20 June 2017, World Refugee Day. Reception centres, asylum support offices and public employment services across Europe can now use this tool to help in their daily work.

### **The Europass Framework**

The Commission has put forward a proposal to modernise the Europass CV along with other Europass documents as well as tools to improve the transparency of skills, qualifications and learning opportunities across Europe on a dedicated website. This will help employers and employees to compare skills and qualifications all over Europe. Negotiations on the Commission's proposal are on-going in both the Council and the European Parliament.

## **Making Vocational Education and Training a First Choice**

Vocational programmes can have excellent outcomes but they are often seen as a second alternative to academic studies. The Commission is supporting Member States to improve their Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems, including to make sure that there are no dead-ends: that VET students can progress to higher education or academic studies if they choose to, and vice-versa. In November we will hold the second edition of the Vocational Skills Week – a cross-Europe campaign to promote how quality vocational training can open the doors to exciting and rewarding careers. We expect 1,500 events and 1 million people to get involved. The EU supports apprenticeships also through various other instruments. The European Alliance for Apprenticeships has so far mobilised over 700,000 places for young people. At least 390,000 apprenticeships have been offered already under the Youth Guarantee. Erasmus+ supports mobility for apprentices, including a new ErasmusPro initiative aimed at supporting 50,000 placements of vocational learners in companies abroad for the period 2018-2020.

## **Analysing brain drain**

Free movement within Europe allows people to put their skills to use where they are needed. But it can also pose challenges, where some regions lose talent, acting as a drag on their competitiveness. To better understand the impact of this brain drain in Europe, the Commission launched a dedicated study to be combined with mutual learning between countries to share direct experiences. The results are expected by mid-2018.

## **The initiative on graduate tracking**

On 30 May 2017, the Commission presented a [proposal for a Recommendation on tracking graduates](#). The Council Recommendation will cover graduates from vocational education and training programmes as well as higher education. Knowing what happens to graduates after they finish their studies eg. how quickly do they get a job, how well do they progress in their careers or further education, is crucial to informing and adapting learning programmes so they offer the best springboard possible to future success. This initiative will encourage and support Member State authorities to improve the quality and availability of information on what happens to their how graduates.

## **The Key Competences Framework**

Following a [public consultation](#) which concluded in May, the Commission will present its proposal to update the 2006 [Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning](#) before the end of the year. This review will seek to determine which skills and competences young people need to acquire to succeed in the job market and in life.

## **The Youth Guarantee**

At least 390,000 apprenticeships have been offered already under the [Youth Guarantee](#). The Youth Guarantee makes it possible to give every young person a

good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

### **Erasmus Pro**

Erasmus+ supports mobility for apprentices, including a new [ErasmusPro](#) initiative aimed at supporting 50,000 placements of vocational learners in companies to spend at least 3 to 12 months abroad for the period 2018-2020. Only a small fraction of apprentices spend time learning in another Member State and even then, it is usually for a very short amount of time (one month on average).